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Serial No. 10/765,920
Office Action dated April 10, 2006

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The following listing of claims replaces all prior listings, and all prior versions, of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection apparatus comprising:
 - a recipe setting unit for setting an inspection recipe and/or a review recipe;
 - an illumination optical system including:
 - a laser light source for emitting ultraviolet laser light;
 - a shutter for selectively restricting passage of the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser light source;
 - a quantity-of-light adjusting unit for adjusting a quantity of the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser light source in accordance with the inspection recipe and/or the review recipe set by the recipe setting unit;
 - an illumination range forming unit for forming on a sample an illumination range of the ultraviolet laser light whose quantity has been adjusted by the quantity-of-light adjusting unit;
 - a coherence reducing system for reducing coherence of the ultraviolet laser light received within the illumination range that has been formed by the illumination range forming unit; and
 - an irradiation optical system for irradiating the sample with a ultraviolet light flux whose coherence has been reduced by the coherence reducing system; and
 - a detection optical system including:
 - a condensing optical system for condensing light reflected from the sample;
 - a diffracted-light control optical system for controlling diffracted light of the reflected light that has been condensed by the condensing optical system; and

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a detecting unit for imaging a reflected light image coming from the sample to detect an image signal, said reflected light image being obtained through the diffracted-light control optical system;

wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

2. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection apparatus comprising:
a recipe setting unit for setting an inspection recipe and/or a review recipe;
a quantity-of-light calculating unit for calculating a quantity of ultraviolet laser light in accordance with the inspection recipe and/or the review recipe that have been set by the recipe setting unit;

an illumination optical system including:

a laser light source for emitting ultraviolet laser light;

a shutter for selectively restricting passage of the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser light source;

a quantity-of-light adjusting unit for adjusting the quantity of the ultraviolet laser light, which has been emitted from the laser light source, to the quantity of light calculated by the quantity-of-light calculating unit;

an illumination range forming unit for forming in a sample an illumination range of the ultraviolet laser light whose quantity has been adjusted by the quantity-of-light adjusting unit;

a coherence reducing system for reducing coherence of the ultraviolet laser light received within the illumination range that has been formed by the illumination range forming unit; and

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an irradiation optical system for irradiating the sample with a ultraviolet light flux whose coherence has been reduced by the coherence reducing system; and

a detection optical system including:

a condensing optical system for condensing light reflected from the sample;

a diffracted-light control optical system for controlling diffracted light of the reflected light that has been condensed by the condensing optical system; and

a detecting unit for imaging a reflected light image coming from the sample to detect an image signal, said reflected light image being obtained through the diffracted-light control optical system;

wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

3. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising:
- an image processing unit for detecting a defect of a pattern formed on the sample on the basis of the detection image signal detected by a detector provided in the detecting unit.
4. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said recipe setting unit has a recipe setting screen.
5. (Previously Presented) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said shutter controls the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser

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light source so that the ultraviolet laser light is switched between a state close to ON and a state close to OFF.

6. (Previously Presented) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein:

said shutter controls the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser light source so that the ultraviolet laser light is switched between a state close to ON and a state close to OFF; and

said shutter can arbitrarily control a period of time during which the ultraviolet laser light is in a state close to OFF.

7. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said quantity-of-light adjusting unit has a filter capable of changing the quantity of transmitted light.

8. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said filter is devised not to return light reflected from an incident plane to the laser light source.

9. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein:

said detecting unit of the detection optical system comprises a first detector for detecting an image signal for inspection and a second detector for detecting an image signal for viewing, each of said first detector and said second detector being imaged a reflected light image obtained from the sample through the diffracted-light

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control system by switching a switching optical system between at the time of the inspection and the viewing.

10. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first detector comprises an accumulated type image sensor.

11. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said image processing unit comprises:

- a storage unit for storing a digital reference image signal;
- a brightness correcting unit for correcting brightness of at least one of the digital image signals so that brightness in a normal portion of the digital detection image signal, which has been detected by the first detector and then converted into the digital signal, becomes substantially the same as brightness of a normal portion of the digital reference image signal stored in the storage unit; and
- a defect detecting unit for detecting a defect of a pattern formed on the sample by comparing the digital detection image signal corrected by the brightness correcting unit with the digital reference image signal.

12. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said image processing unit comprises:

- a storage unit for storing a digital reference image signal;
- a scatter-diagram creation unit for creating a scatter diagram illustrating an association between a feature index in a normal portion of the digital detection image signal and a feature index in a normal portion of the digital reference image signal stored in the storage unit, said digital detection image signal being detected by the first detector and then being converted into a digital signal;

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a local gray-scale converter for correcting a local gray scale value of at least one of the digital image signals on the basis of the scatter diagram created by the scatter-diagram creation unit; and

a defect detecting unit for detecting a defect of a pattern formed on the sample by comparing the digital detection image signal corrected by the local gray-scale converter with the digital reference image signal.

13. (Original) A pattern defect inspection apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said diffracted-light control optical system comprises a polarization element group.

14. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection apparatus comprising:
a laser light source for emitting laser light;
a shutter for selectively restricting passage of the ultraviolet laser light emitted from the laser light source;
an illumination optical system for reducing coherence of the laser light emitted from the laser light source before irradiating a sample with the laser light;
a detection optical system for detecting an image of the sample irradiated by the illumination optical system; and
an image processing unit for handling the image of the sample detected by the detection optical system;
wherein said inspection apparatus handles a wafer having a diameter of 300 mm at a speed equivalent to a throughput of three pieces of wafers or more per hour, and detects a defect having a size of 100 nm included in a pattern formed on the sample; and

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wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

15. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection method comprising:
a recipe setting step for setting an inspection recipe and/or a review recipe;
an illumination step comprising the sub-steps of:

opening a shutter to allow passage of ultraviolet laser light emitted from
a laser light source;

adjusting by quantity-of-light adjusting unit a quantity of ultraviolet laser
light emitted from a laser light source in accordance with the inspection recipe
and/or the review recipe set by the recipe setting step;

forming by illumination range forming unit an illumination range of the
adjusted ultraviolet laser light in a sample;

reducing by coherence reducing system coherence of the ultraviolet
laser light received within the formed illumination range; and

irradiating by an irradiation optical system the sample with the
ultraviolet light flux whose coherence has been reduced; and

a detection step comprising the sub-steps of:

condensing reflected light coming from the sample by a condensing
optical system;

controlling diffracted light of the condensed reflected light by a
diffracted-light control optical system;

imaging by a detector a reflected light image from the sample to detect
an image signal, said reflected light image being obtained by the control; and

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closing the shutter after the reflected light image has been imaged by the detector;

wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

16. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection method comprising:
a recipe setting step for setting an inspection recipe and/or a review recipe;
a quantity-of-light calculating step for calculating a quantity of ultraviolet laser light in accordance with the inspection recipe and/or the review recipe that have been set by the recipe setting step;

an illumination step comprising the sub-steps of:

opening a shutter to allow passage of ultraviolet laser light emitted from a laser light source;

adjusting by a quantity-of-light adjusting unit the quantity of ultraviolet laser light emitted from a laser light source so as to become the quantity of light calculated by the quantity-of-light calculating step;

forming by illumination range forming unit an illumination range of the adjusted ultraviolet laser light in a sample;

reducing by coherence reducing system coherence of the ultraviolet laser light received within the formed illumination range; and

irradiating by an irradiation optical system the sample with the ultraviolet light flux whose coherence has been reduced; and

a detection step comprising the sub-steps of:

condensing reflected light coming from the sample by a condensing optical system;

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controlling diffracted light of the condensed reflected light by a diffracted-light control optical system;

imaging by a detector a reflected light image from the sample to detect an image signal, said reflected light image being obtained by the control; and

closing the shutter after the reflected light image has been imaged by the detector;

wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

17. (Original) A pattern defect inspection method according to claim 15, further comprising:

an image processing step for detecting a defect of a pattern formed on the sample on the basis of the detection image signal detected by the detector in an image processing unit.

18. (Original) A pattern defect inspection method according to claim 15, wherein, in the recipe setting step, the inspection recipe and/or the review recipe are set on a recipe setting screen.

19. (Previously Presented) A pattern defect inspection method according to claim 15, wherein the quantity of light is adjusted by use of said shutter to control the quantity of light so that the quantity of light is switched between a state close to ON and a state close to OFF.

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20. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection method comprising:
an illumination step for irradiating a sample with ultraviolet light flux; and
a step for obtaining an image signal by imaging the irradiated sample,

wherein:

said illumination step further comprises the sub-steps of:

opening a shutter to allow passage of ultraviolet laser light emitted from
a laser light source;

adjusting the quantity of ultraviolet laser light emitted from a laser light
source by quantity-of-light adjusting unit in accordance with a state of a
sample;

forming by illumination range forming unit an illumination range of the
adjusted ultraviolet laser light in a sample;

reducing by coherence reducing system coherence of the ultraviolet
laser light received within the formed illumination range; and

irradiating by an irradiation optical system the sample with the
ultraviolet light flux whose coherence has been reduced; and

said step for obtaining an image signal further comprises the sub-steps
of:

condensing reflected light coming from the sample by a condensing
optical system;

controlling diffracted light of the condensed reflected light by a
diffracted-light control optical system;

imaging by a detector a reflected light image from the sample to detect
an image signal, said reflected light image being obtained by the control; and

closing the shutter after the reflected light image has been imaged by
the detector;

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wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.

21. (Currently Amended) A pattern defect inspection method comprising:
opening a shutter to allow passage of ultraviolet laser light emitted from a laser light source;

irradiating a wafer having a diameter of 300 mm with ultraviolet laser light whose coherence has been reduced;

imaging the irradiated wafer to detect an image of the wafer;

closing the shutter after the reflected light image has been imaged by the detector; and

handling the detected image of the wafer to detect a defect having a size of 100 nm or less in a pattern formed on the wafer with a throughput of three pieces of wafers or more per hour;

wherein the shutter opens when part of an area of the sample to be inspected is in a viewing field of the detection optical system and closes when the area to be inspected is out of the viewing field.